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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA, THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P., AT THE DINNER GIVEN AT 8.00 PM WEDNESDAY 6 FEBRUARY 1974 BY U NE WIN, CHAIRMAN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AND PRIME MINISTER OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF BURMA

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Although this is not my first visit to the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, I come here on this occasion as the first Australian Prime Minister to visit your country. In so doing, I acknowledge with gratitude the warm and generous welcome accorded to my wife and me, and to our party. We look forward, Mr Chairman, to welcoming you and your gracious wife to Australia. I hope these visits will serve as the basis for further fruitful development in the range and nature of the relationship between our two countries. I believe there are grounds for confidence that, because we now share more common interests than we did before, there will emerge a more intimate and substantial relationship between Australia and Burma.

For our part, we are seeking to chart a new course for Australia in its relations with the countries of Asia. By adopting a more independent Australian stance in international affairs, by striving to turn Australia away from a military orientation in its relations with South-East Asia and by trying to remove the stain of racialism from our policies, we hope to achieve for Australia a new standing as a distinctive, tolerant and co-operative nation, not only in Asia but in the world.

In support of these objectives we have shifted the emphasis of our continuing involvement in Asia, and especially in South-East Asia, from one dominated by ideological distinctions and military alliances to one based more on encouraging security through regional co-operation, on facilitating trade with our near neighbours on a mutually beneficial basis, and on promoting economic development through constructive aid programs where these are wanted and where our own resources and skills can be usefully applied. We see a greater range of contacts through tourism, education and culture.

Such contacts, we believe, will contribute significantly to furthering our understanding of one another. I also believe that Ministerial and Parliamentary visits, like those exchanged recently between Australia and Burma, are of great value to both of us, and I would hope to see such visits extended.

I stress that we do not seek to impose any unwanted culture or alien forms upon our friends. Nor do we seek to provide economic assistance where this is not welcome or useful. While we desire to live more intimately with Asia than we have in the past, we accept that in many ways the extent and nature of this new relationship is not ours alone to determine. Because we seek to retain our own freedom of choice and to develop our own independence and distinctiveness, we appreciate the aspirations of others to do the same.

In coming to Burma at this time I appreciate that you are in the middle of an election - an historic election consequent upon the introduction of a new Constitution. I am aware that the introduction of the Constitution and the consultations with the people in the course of the drafting process represent the culmination of your long-held aspirations for the evolution of a form of government in Burma suited to the needs of the country and its people, and that for more than two years it has imposed a heavy burden on you and your Ministers. I congratulate you on the successful outcome of the national referendum on the Constitution held last December. In the same month there was a Referendum in Australia on Constitutional changes, I may say, Sir, that I envy you in the success you achieved in your Referendum.

Australians have long admired the way Burma has maintained its independence by its own efforts and by the skill, determination and spirit of sturdy self-reliance which have enabled you to negotiate your way through so many difficulties created by the interference of outside countries in the affairs of the region.

We have noticed that in the United Nations, and in other councils, Burma has spoken eloquently of its opposition to imperialism, colonialism, nuclear weapons testing, racial discrimination and apartheid. You have stressed the fundamental importance - and here I quote your distinguished Foreign Minister - "of promoting the progressive establishment of and a universal respect for the role of law". These are all matters on which my Government, too, has deep convictions. They are matters in which my Government has taken important policy initiatives in the past year.

I believe Australia and Burma share a number of common objectives in our immediate region. We seek to avoid destructive confrontations and to bring about constructive co-operation. We hope to see evolve, in time, a truly regional community without ideological overtones and free of Great Power rivalries. We seek a durable peace in South-East Asia in partnership with other nations of the region. I understand the name "Rangoon" is derived from Burmese words meaning "end of strife". Our goal, indeed, is a South-East Asia free from strife. It will no doubt take time to achieve that goal and the rest of our common objectives in the region and elsewhere. In the meantime, however, I look to the consolidation of our bilateral relations, believing that such consolidation will bring us closer to the realisation of our wider goals and aspirations.

I am happy to have your assurances of the usefulness of the Australian Aid Program in Burma. There will be an annual increase in the size of that program. The Australian Government has pledged itself to increase the level of its financial development assistance to .7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product by the end of the decade. We also intend to increase the percentage of our aid given through multilateral programs. Burma's developing relationship with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank means that in this area also we will be able increasingly to contribute to Burma's programs for economic development.

I give these assurances in the full awareness that there will be new claims on Australia, especially from the emerging countries of the South Pacific area, and that shortages of energy and resources will raise uncertainties about the economic and financial future. Australia and Burma are both rich in natural resources. Burma is in the happy position of having full national control over its resources. My Government faces the urgent task of progressively resuming control over the development of Australia's mineral resources, a large part of which are now owned by foreign companies. At the same time we are developing policies for the balanced development of our resources and to control their sale in accordance with our national interests in a world where energy is scarce.

Mr Chairman, I have deeply appreciated the frank and fruitful discussions we have had during my visit. I believe we have established that there are no problems between our two countries, but rather that there are opportunities for growth and development in many aspects of our relationship. Especially I would hope to see positive development in the areas of trade, aid and cultural contacts.

Australians have much to learn from the rich cultural and philosophical heritage that belongs to our near neighbours. By learning more about this heritage we will be better placed to gain from it, so that our perception of the needs and interests of these countries will be deepened and enlarged. My Government will do all it can to promote the flow of ideas and experience from the ancient civilisations of our neighbourhood. My visit to Burma - so brief, yet so memorable - will equip us better for that task. I have had the opportunity to

hear your views and to explain our own. I shall leave with a better understanding of your policies, your culture and your people, confident that on the basis of this new understanding we will forge a rich, valuable and enduring friendship between our two countries.

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